



State of Wisconsin  
Department of Public Instruction  
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

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\*\*\* STATE OF EDUCATION \*\*\*

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

State of Education Address

*Capitol Rotunda, Madison — September 18, 2008*

Thank you, Ben (Bedore) for that kind introduction. Congratulations to both you and Chelsea (Shurilla), our boys and girls Badger State Superintendents and thank you for your participation today.

Thank you, Dan Nerad for serving as our master of ceremonies. The Madison Metropolitan School District is fortunate you are their leader.

Thank you, UW-Madison Brass Quintet, Jonathan Overby, and the Wisconsin Army National Guard for your presentations.

We have in attendance today a number of distinguished individuals. I would like to introduce and ask to stand:

Constitutional Officer, State Treasurer Dawn Marie Sass, Supreme Court Justices Ann Walsh Bradley and Patrick Crooks, and Secretary Rick Ramisch of the Department of Corrections.

The heads of our institutions of higher education: Kevin Reilly, President of the University of Wisconsin System; Dan Clancy, President of the Wisconsin Technical College System, represented by Morna Foy; and Rolf Wegenke, President of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

And would all our State Legislators who are with us today stand. We thank you and ask your continued support for public education.

A special thanks to all tribal leaders, school board members, and other elected officials who may have joined us. Please join me in showing our appreciation for their public service.

We recognize all staff in our schools, public libraries institutions of higher education, the Department of Public Instruction, the CESAs, WEAC led by President Mary Bell, AFT-Wisconsin led by President Bryan Kennedy, AWSA led by Executive Director Jim Lynch, WASB led by Executive Director John Ashley, Wisconsin Library Association led by President Pat Chevis, and WEMTA President Jo Anne Carr, and the many individuals and organizations in this state who support education.

And, a special welcome to Miles Turner of WASDA and all of our district administrators from throughout our great state.

And a very special guest for me, my husband John Burmaster, principal of Jefferson Middle School in Madison and the love of my life.

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I am so honored to serve as your state superintendent.

Public education in Wisconsin has been stretched to the limit. Wisconsin's dedicated educators have been resilient in balancing the needs of today with tomorrow's expectations.

However, unless we reinvest in our PK-12 education system and make our students world ready, Wisconsin will lose our competitive edge in the 21st century.

Faced with 15 years of revenue caps and rising costs, school boards have struggled to preserve academic success and promote innovation. They have been forced into agonizing decisions to close schools, cut programs, eliminate services, and limit educational opportunities.

Facing increasing child poverty, our schools and local communities have reached deeper and worked harder to support Wisconsin's children and families in need.

Facing job losses, increasing prices, and a struggling economy, Wisconsin families have been forced to make agonizing choices of their own and have had to set tough priorities in their own family budgets.

The people of Wisconsin have always prioritized public education. Indeed, access to quality public education, no matter where you live in our state, has always been one of our most cherished values.

The quality of life we have in Wisconsin is a direct result of public education's promise that if you worked hard, did well in school, and were a responsible member of your community, you would get a good job.

That promise will only stay alive for this generation of Wisconsin children and families if education readies them for the workforce of the 21st century, and if we as a state continue to invest in a strong public education system that serves all of our students.

Public education in Wisconsin has been stretched to the limit. Is the breaking point near? Ask any one of these district superintendents. Our schools and communities can stretch no longer.

Today, I am proposing a state education budget that significantly reinvests in our PK-12 system.

A budget that commits to two-thirds state funding.

A budget that brings local property taxpayer relief.

A budget that prioritizes early childhood education, small class sizes, global literacy, teacher recruitment, compensation, and repeal of the QEO.

A budget that addresses increasing child poverty and the rising cost of transportation, special education, English-language learners, public libraries, and operating small, rural school districts.

And, a budget that, for the first time in 15 years, provides real revenue limit relief for all our schools.

We all know times are tight, and the 2009-11 biennial budget will be no exception. By working together, and with our Governor Jim Doyle and Legislature, we can begin the reinvestment that schools and communities need to keep our families, our children, and our state competitive in the 21st century.

By working together, we can make sure that education remains Wisconsin's top priority.

Because access and equity in public education are moral issues.

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Access and equity in public education are social justice issues.

Access and equity in public education are an economic imperative.

The PK-12 education system is the foundation for all future workforce development.

Quality education begins in early childhood and includes:

- Rigorous and relevant academic standards aligned with postsecondary and workforce expectations.
- World languages starting in elementary school;
- Respect for heritage and tribal languages;
- A strong emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM);
- The arts, gifted and talented, career, technical, and international education;
- And, meaningful connections between education and the working world, including service learning, youth apprenticeship, and guidance for students as they prepare career pathways.

For our Wisconsin economy to be strong in this 21st century, our students and our schools must be world ready.

Our partners in higher education and Wisconsin's business community tells us that they need high school graduates who:

- are creative and innovative;
- can think critically, identify and solve problems;
- have communication skills;
- are responsible and ethical; and
- understand other cultures and perspectives.

For Wisconsin students to be world ready, investment in STEM must be a priority. Today, in my budget, I am calling for:

- expanded STEM grants;
- STEM academies that would link local businesses, industry, and schools to meet workforce needs in Wisconsin economic development regions; and
- a STEM stewardship fund to upgrade middle and high school classrooms and laboratories for 21st century instruction.

I am calling for: loan forgiveness to attract teachers to high poverty schools in the critical shortage areas of STEM, world language, English as a second language, and special education.

For well over a decade, federal law has focused standards, assessments, and accountability systems on improving achievement of all our students. While our students are showing progress, we know our real challenge is to go beyond the basics, go beyond the mandates of No Child Left Behind, and go beyond where we have traditionally set the bar.

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We must empower all students to thrive in the job markets of Wisconsin and the global economy. Our students must be world ready, Wisconsin.

And, although our students have been among the most successful in the nation for the past century and our state is a leader in high school graduation rates, that's still not enough when one out of every 10 Wisconsin high school students fails to graduate and achievement gaps persist.

We must bring people together around our shared value and responsibility to raise student achievement and close the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and their peers.

In this 21st Century, we must graduate every child world ready, Wisconsin.

We must create a collaborative agenda that supports our growing numbers of children in poverty and children of color in Wisconsin. We must lift up all the children of this generation, not divide them against each other.

Then – and only then – will we truly realize the potential of a public education system that can preserve our American democracy, that can secure economic prosperity, and that can ensure justice and compassion in civic life.

That is our New Wisconsin Promise.

Our public schools and our communities are stretched to the limit. Together, we must respond.

At this moment in time, we must reinvest in public education. So our students are world ready, Wisconsin.

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*Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.*

**NOTE:** A high-resolution photo of the state superintendent is available for download on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/vm-media.html>.